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UNCLAS PORT AU PRINCE 001449

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR
OES
INR/IAA/MAC
STATE PASS TO AID FOR LAR/CAR
TREASURY FOR ALLEN RODRIGUEZ, GREGORY BERGER, WILLIAM
BALDRIDGE AND LARRY MCDONALD
USDOC FOR 4322/ITA/MAN/WH/OLAC/ (SMITH, S.)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [HA](#)

SUBJECT: EARTHQUAKE, AFTERSHOCKS SHAKE PORT AU PRINCE

[1](#)1. SUMMARY: On May 11, a magnitude 4.3 earthquake shook Port-au-Prince, followed by aftershocks in subsequent days. The epicenter of the earthquake was 5 miles south of the center of Port-au-Prince. There were no reported injuries and only very minor damage. Haiti has suffered from earthquakes in the past and two fault lines traverse the country, one in the north and one in the south. A more severe earthquake would be catastrophic, as the government of Haiti is unprepared to handle a natural disaster of any magnitude. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. On May 11, at 2058 local time, a magnitude 4.3 earthquake shook Port-au-Prince. The epicenter of the earthquake was 5 miles south of the center of Port-au-Prince. There were no reported injuries and only very minor damage to the capital city. In the days following the earthquake, Port-au-Prince has felt aftershocks, most notably on May 14 at approximately 1900, May 23 at approximately 0300 and May 23 at approximately 1445.

[1](#)3. Historically, Haiti has suffered from a number of earthquakes, including one in 1770 that destroyed Port-au-Prince and one in 1842 that caused extensive damage in northern Haiti and killed thousands. Two major fault lines cross the country, one in the north and one in the south: the southern fault line cuts through the southern part of Port-au-Prince. Earthquake experts consider both faults quite dangerous. The northern fault, in particular, has not released significant energy in over 800 years. According to experts, approximately 4 to 8 meters of left lateral slippage has already accumulated and should it be released, could register 8.0 or higher on the Richter scale, with no forewarning. The soil conditions in Haiti are such that an earthquake anywhere in the country could cause severe liquefaction, whereby soil is turned to a quicksand type liquid, which is a considerable threat to infrastructure such as buildings, dams, bridges and highways.

[1](#)4. COMMENT: The last thing Haiti needs now is an earthquake. Compounding problems of political instability, poverty and environmental degradation, the flooding last September in Gonaives caused by Tropical Storm Jeanne demonstrated how unprepared the Interim Government of Haiti is to handle a natural disaster. A severe earthquake would be catastrophic. On OFDA team will come to Port-au-Prince in June to help the embassy coordinate its disaster preparations, and to try to jump-start IGOH and donor coordination and planning. END COMMENT.